

78 Lonsdale Avenue
Berowra Heights 2082
9456 4007
gws@pacific.net.au
9 April 2006

Dear Jen,

I note from the CCC program that you will be giving a talk on Cornish lighthouses. What I have to say here has little bearing on that, but I thought you might be mildly interested, and might even find something you can use in your talk. In essence, 4 generations of the Stevens family served the lighthouses of the Victorian coast for almost 88 years.

It started with William Stevens, 31 August 1828 to 27 February 1895 who was born in Westbourne Sussex and who served in the Royal Navy until about 1857 when he was discharged as medically unfit. Family lore has it that William suffered a war injury to one of his legs, and was thereafter limited to light duties. If this is true, it was possibly during one of the few Naval engagements of the Crimean War. William migrated to Geelong in February 1858 and after a short period employed by the Victorian government as a water boatmen, joined the Victorian Lighthouse Service. He spent the next 22 years as a light keeper in 6 Victorian lights such as Port Fairy, Wilsons Promontory, Cape Otway.

William, 6 March 1866 to 4 November 1944, joined the Victorian Lighthouse service in 17 April 1889, and remained a light keeper for 31 years. After retirement, he regularly did relieving Keeper duties when Head Keepers went on leave, almost to the day he died aged 78.

GFWer, but he spent the first 16 years of his life living with his parents at all the 15 lights at which GFW was a Keeper. I recall GFW telling me once that dad was every bit as capable as an experienced keeper, and from the age of 14 stood GFW

My first job was as a 16 year old Deck Boy on the Lighthouse supply vessel Cape York in 1945. We serviced all the offshore and remote lights in a big area which extended from the Investigator Group Islands at the eastern end of the Great Australian Bight to Gabo Island near the NSW Victorian border and south to Maatsuyker Island in the Southern Ocean, 120 Km to the SW of Hobart.

One of my family heirlooms is a book titled Lighthouses of the World. It is the 6th edition, published in London March 1, 1866. For a number of countries it lists the then lighthouses by name, character, latitude and longitude, description, description of the apparatus, height above high water, visibility in miles and the year established. Interestingly, although it lists Australia as such, it lists Canada as British America.

For England, the areas shown are Thames Mouth, South Coast, West Coast and East Coast. If you regard Eddystone as being off the coast of Devon, the Cornish lights shown under South & West Coast are Falmouth, Lizard, Wolf Rock, Penzance Tide Light, Longships, Seven Stones Light Vessel, Scilly, Bishop Rock, St Ives Tide Light, Hayle Tide Lights, Godrevy and Trevose Head. The 3 oldest are Scilly 1680, Lizard 1751 and Longships 1795.

Eight of these lights had catoptric (reflector) lights. Two had dioptric (lens) lights of first order magnitude and being fixed lenticular. Actually there were 3 of these because Trevose Head had a lower light 50 feet to seaward of the upper light. Godrevy had a first order dioptric fixed and flashing light. Penzance Tide Light was a fifth order (small) harbour light 14 n 1866 these small lens cost between £103 and £195, and the whole light assembly cost between £257 and £349.

Eddystone is described as an admirable stone tower, and Bishop Rock as a noble stone tower.

At this time, England had about 200 lights, and there were about 500 in England, Scotland and Ireland.

By comparison Australia, only 78 years after the arrival of the First Fleet, had 51 lights from Rottnest Island in the south west to Fraser Island in the north east to Maatsuyker in the deep south. The last manned light in Australia, Maatsuyker Island, was changed to automatic operation 27 August 1966, at which time there were 228 Australian lights.

By now you are probably wondering how I have come by this information. The story is that about 5 years ago Shirley was attending a Shoalhaven U3A lecture, supposedly on Cornwall, and the convenor asked if anyone would like to prepare and deliver a lecture on any interesting subject. Knowing my family background in lighthouses, Shirley volunteered me. So for a while when we were living in Vincentia I was delivering a 4 hour lecture (split into two 2 hour segments) on lighthouses. Attached are copies of some of the handout material which I prepared.

Just in conclusion, to make our CCC a success we need at least 200 attendees, so anything you can do to get people to apply to me will be a big help. They don't cost anything.

Cheers,
George Stevens